



An Exercise in Direct Sketching

THE BROKEN SILHOUETTE

Marc Taro Holmes, Author of *The Urban Sketcher*, and www.CitizenSketcher.com
Workshop notes, 2017 USK Symposium, Chicago



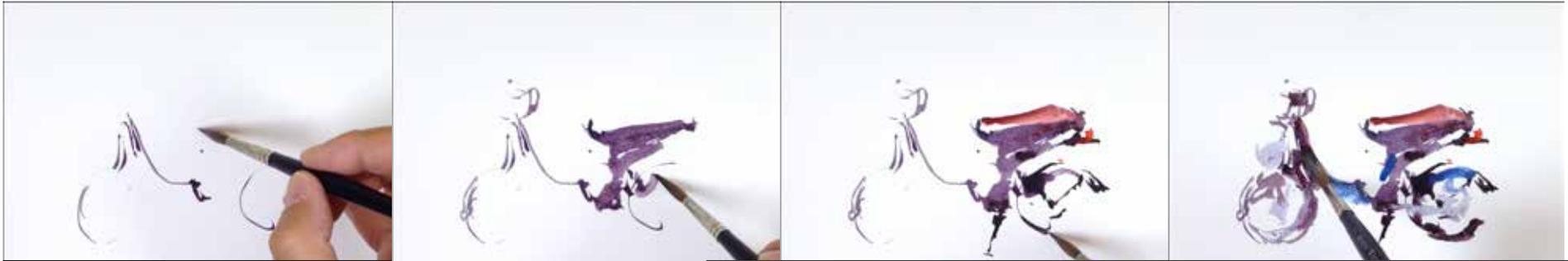


THE IDEA IS SIMPLY: Sketch with a brush, straight onto dry white paper, with rich, juicy mixes of paint, picked up as directly as possible from the paint box.

THIS APPROACH can help novices break out of tinting over top of line drawings, and serves to introduce the idea of mixing color on the paper, rather than on the palette.



Try a POINTED ROUND SABLE, or a modern synthetic. Let strokes fuse naturally (don't blend by hand). Also, fresh TUBE color works best!



EX#1: 5x5 Min Sketches

FIRST BRUSH SKETCH: An isolated object

Leave a white background, (ignore whatever else is going on). You might try the same object three times in a row. Each attempt will turn out a little differently. Or, sketch a few similar things in a series. Like, three motorcycles, or three people in the park. You might be doing this on the street, or in a museum, or from photos if necessary.



Mixing colors on the palette is OK, but too much water vs. pigment and you'll get a pale washed out shape lacking sharp edges.

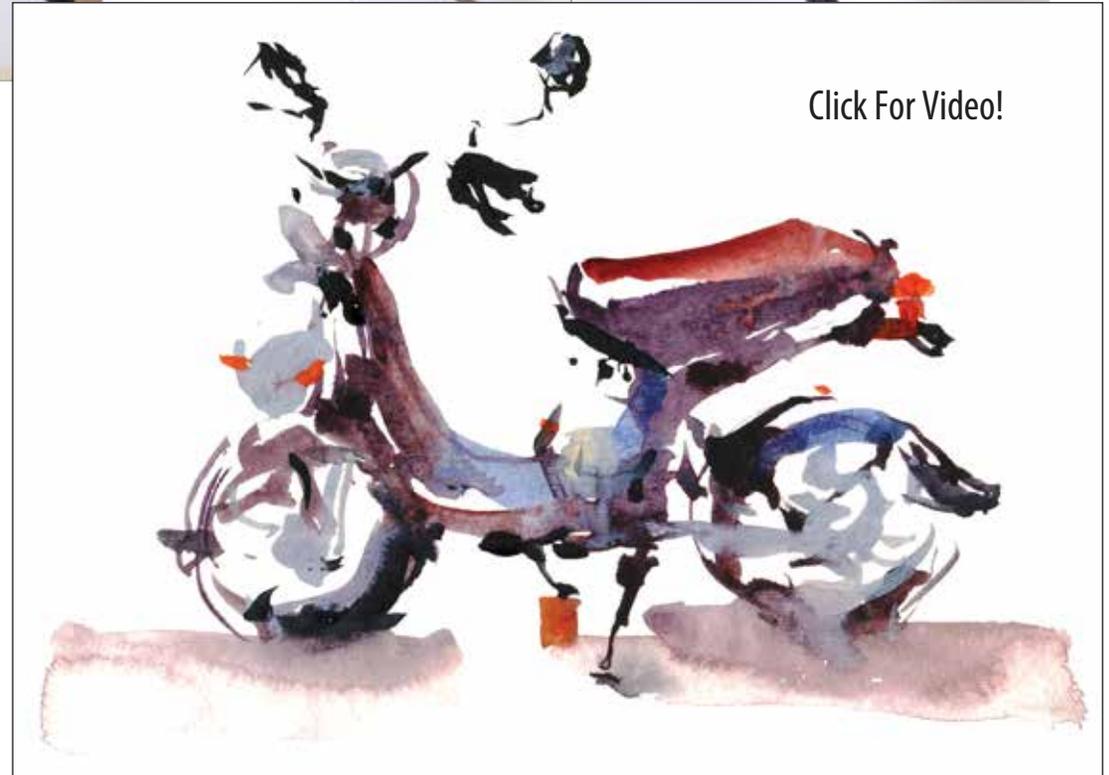
Place colors just touching the one before - they'll intermingle into a fused shape. Don't go back and do any manual blending. Let the paints mix naturally.

The goal is highly pigmented strokes, one next to the other. I use white or pastel color to lighten a mix without losing strength.

Brush strokes should gradually assemble into a silhouette filled with exciting watercolor effects.

Darks may have to be re-stated as your shape begins to dry.

The goal is to complete the entire shape in 'one pass', to get a 'solid' silhouette made of broken color.



[Click For Video!](#)

EX#2: 3x10 Minute Mini Paintings



If you get (unwanted) hard edges inside your background, you're probably going too slow. Try premixing color, or use a bigger brush. And don't stop where you don't want an edge.

SECOND BRUSH SKETCH: Draw with the Background

Continue with isolated objects (maybe redo the very same subject).

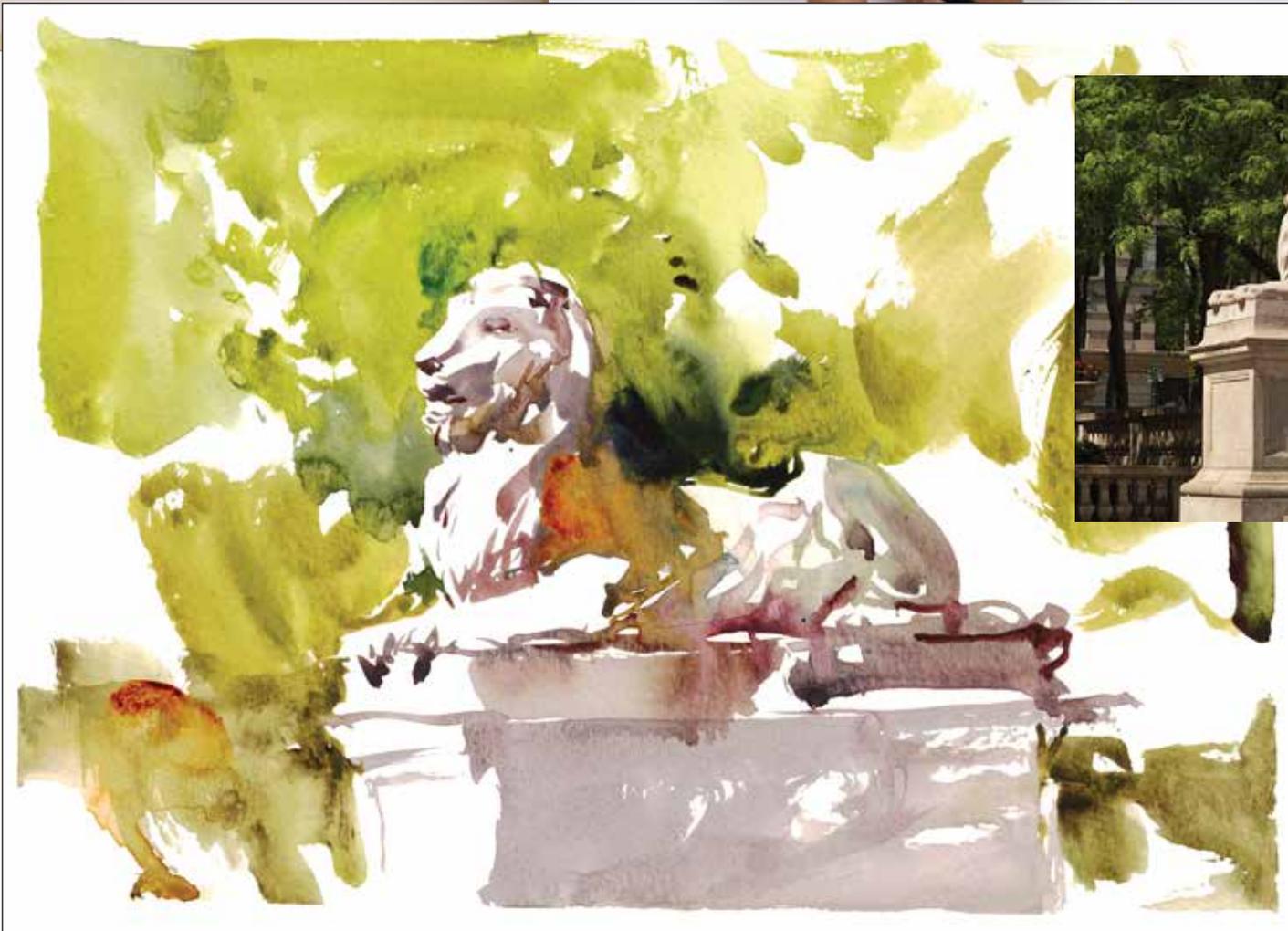
This time, draw it by surrounding it with a background tone, making a negative shape.

Then fill in the subject's shadows - leaving a sharp edge between the wet negative and wet positive shapes.

This is a great exercise in brush control, emphasizing reserved white highlights. It's a skill you'll use anytime you want to stack up overlapping objects or paint a sky without waiting for it to dry.

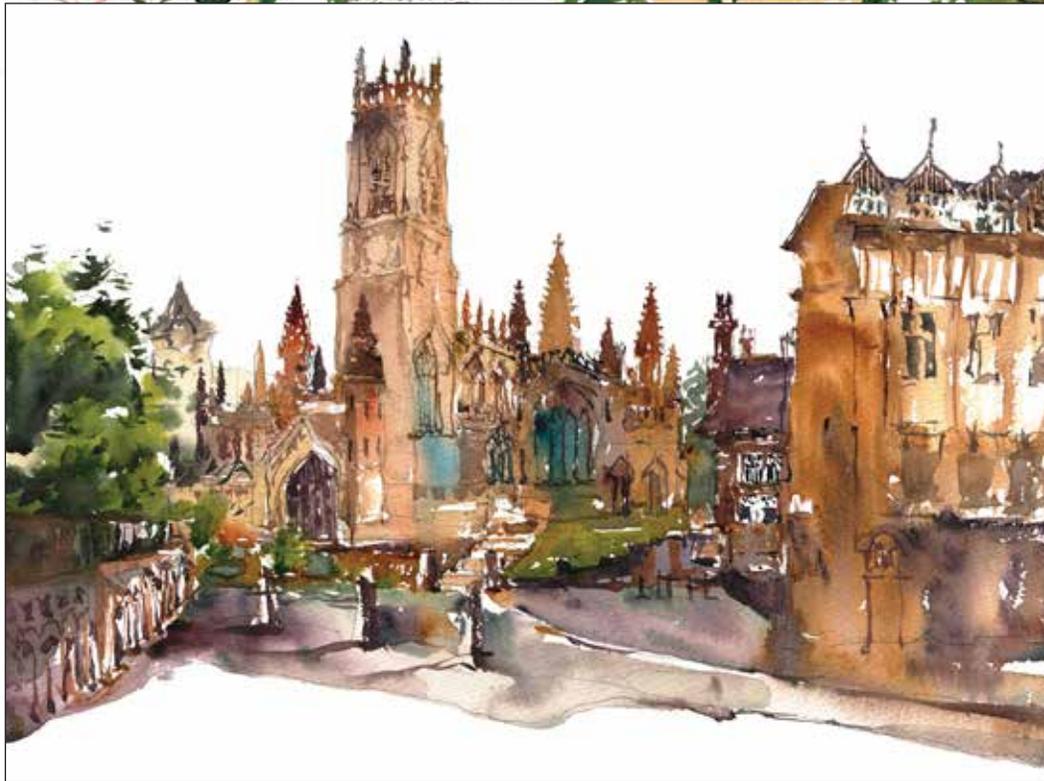
This is also the simplest complete' painting. A figure and a ground. It can make any sketch into a finished work.





If you can **find a high key object with a dark background**, that's the perfect opportunity to try "Reserving the Whites". Simply paint around the highlights, leaving white paper between the background tone and the shadow shape.

THE BACKGROUND DOESN'T HAVE TO BE FLAT - ESPECIALLY IF IT'S TREES OR CLOUDS.



ONCE YOU CAN CONFIDENTLY PAINT A SINGLE SILHOUETTE - YOU REALIZE EVERY PAINTING IS JUST A SERIES OF CONNECTED SILHOUETTES :)

THIRD BRUSH SKETCH: Link up a series of silhouettes into a STREET VIEW or PANORAMA



EX#3: 1x20 Minute Street View

TIPS FOR SIMPLIFYING:

Get really far away | Don't get bogged down with realism or accuracy | Suppress detail by squinting, or looking above your glasses | Leave out cars, people, everything but the buildings (maybe keep a few street lights for context) | Merge anything side by side, that's a similar color, into one shape | Close gaps between objects | Don't paint too many windows | Push screening trees behind buildings | Skip the sky for now | Leave out any distracting background objects.



Don't be a Perfectionist: This is just an exercise in making tightly-fit shapes with clever negative cutouts. Be ruthless with suppressing detail - and don't worry about a perfect likeness. You might come to like these simple color studies - but they're mainly meant to teach brushwork and mixing color on the page.



SIMPLIFYING CITYSCAPES:
Group buildings into three layers - Fore Mid Back | No windows in last layer | Street level traffic and People can be just dots and dashes.

This one was closer to 40 minutes. More stuff, same working pace. Keep forcing yourself to simplify!

If we have spare time at the end, we can do a longer one like this.



THE BROKEN SILHOUETTE

Marc Taro Holmes, Author of *The Urban Sketcher*, and www.CitizenSketcher.com
Workshop notes, 2017 USK Symposium, Chicago

